

## ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE.\*

WE continue our notice of the valuable article on this subject in the current number of the *Quarterly*.

"It has been doubted whether we possess any Christian edifices at Rome belonging to the age of Constantine. The late Mr. Hope places the earliest in the reign of Theodosius. This is a misconception, in consequence either of his supposing that the sacred structures of the Constantinian era which still exist were heathen temples, or of his forgetting that a baptistery was essentially a church, though not commonly called by that name. In Italy, every baptistery and every chapter-house has its altar; we believe, that, with respect to the latter buildings, such was equally the case in England.

We are, however, very deficient in information as to the architecture of the Greek and Oriental churches. This deficiency, we trust, will be supplied by the increasing energy of our travellers. Asia minor might, without doubt, supply far more facts than have hitherto been obtained. Ecclesiastical archaeology ought to be investigated with the same cheerful diligence which Mr. Fellows has exhibited with respect to Hellenic and Lycian antiquity. One very remarkable specimen we possess in our own dominions. It is the portal of the church at Carfu, erected by Justinian, A.D. 364, known only by means of an imperfect drawing given by Dr. Walsh.

Reverting, however, to the influence of hallowed locality, the first and earliest Christian churches of which we can form any clear idea, either from actual plans or existing remains, are the *sepulchral churches* of the Constantinian age; we commence our series by the most remarkable monument of the Christian world.

In the florid description of Eusebius, we find an elaborate yet confused notice of the sacred buildings raised by Constantine at Jerusalem. The panegyrist exalts our notions of the munificence of the founder and the splendour of the structures; yet amidst his rhetorical phrases, we obtain only a vague conception of their ichnography. The Chevalier Bunsen has bestowed an ample commentary upon the difficult text, whose words, as we have observed, convey but an indefinite conception of the architectural arrangements. This information must be sought elsewhere, and we possess it. But it is not through the medium of the writers of Rome or Byzantium that we have been presented with the ground-plan, which, however rude, removes all uncertainty as to the type presented by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or the plan according to which it was formed.

Whence do we obtain this knowledge? Would it be guessed that we derive it from regions covered by almost impenetrable obscurity? Are we to seek our records of the monument raised by Constantine, amidst that opprobrium of our historical research, the Pictish race, or to obtain the solution of our doubts from the enigmatical Pictish realm? Amongst the shadows of past times, are there any more visionary and unsubstantial than Taran MacEntaidie and Brudei Mac-Deirly, who lit before us like beings of another world? Yet it is in the remotest, the most secluded of the Western Isles, amongst the Pictish race, and from the Pictish wilds, that the knowledge, denied elsewhere, is obtained. Luna shines in the midst of Cimmerian darkness. Here flourished Abbot Adamnan, so distinguished by his participation in the great Paschal controversy, A.D. 705; and he supplies the architectural antiquary with the knowledge so much desired. We owe the information to a singular contingency. After a long pilgrimage and continued residence in the Holy Land, a Danish bishop named *Arculphus*, driven to the Hebrides, became the guest of the Culdee monastery. Here he related his perils, describing the holy places he had visited; and the *Libellus de locis sanctis* contains his narrative.

Rarely has any work been transmitted with more peculiarity and authenticity. Adamnan wrote upon his tablets from the actual dictation of the stranger; the notes so taken became the book we now possess. The Holy Sepulchre, as might be anticipated, was the main object of Adamnan's curiosity; and, in addition to the verbal description, Arculphus drew a plan of the buildings upon the tablets with his own hand."

A copy of this plan is given, and affords some curious information:—

"From its sanctity and celebrity, the holy sepulchre became the primitive type of all the other churches of a circular form. It has been considered by most antiquaries, that the circular temples of ancient Rome, such as that of Vesta and the somewhat hypothetical *Minerva Medica*, constitute the models for the circular church; but this supposition, though plausible, is quite unworkable. The outline proves nothing. The circular shape would naturally suggest itself for buildings in which a sepulchre was to be the chief object; and there is a most essential difference in the type of the circular temple and the circular church, demonstrating that the latter *cannot* have been copied from the former. The temple has its detached columns on the exterior, supporting an entablature; the church has its detached columns arranged in concentric circles within, connected by arches springing from the capitals, forming one or more aisle or aisles.

Such was the church which Constantine raised over the tomb of his mother Helen, now called the Torre Pignaterra; but the ruin now exhibits nothing but rude brick walls, and we gain no knowledge beyond the fact of the adaptation of the form.

More perfect is the church of *Santa Costanza*, the burial-place of Constantia, daughter of Constantine, of which Mr. Knight has given an excellent engraving, plate iii. Some have supposed it to be an ancient Temple of Bacchus.

"This opinion is principally founded on the mosaics with which the ceiling of the aisles is adorned, and which represent vine-leaves and grapes. But the vine is a Christian emblem, and is so frequently introduced in the decoration of Christian places of worship, that little weight can be attached to this circumstance. The architecture of this building is in conformity with the style of the time of Constantine, and not in conformity with that of a much earlier date."

"The plan bears as much resemblance to that of the Holy Sepulchre as could be needed or expected in an edifice of contracted dimensions. But it shows how that edifice had become a type; and, except in the duplication of the pillars, it approaches closely to what we must suppose the Round Church of Cambridge to have been, before the erection of the modern chancel.

*San' Sefuno rotondo* is the largest of the ancient round churches now existing, and the most perfect example of structures erected according to this type. The plan shows how very closely the model of the Holy Sepulchre was followed. It has been supposed that portions were added by Pope Nicholas V.; but from the comparison with Adamnan's plan, we cannot doubt that he merely repaired what had stood before. The earnest zeal exhibited by antiquaries to rescue any work of architecture from the reproach of Christianity, has induced them to contest for this church the honour, also claimed for *Santa Costanza*, of having been a heathen temple. Few indeed, especially of the Italians, are disposed to abandon its primitive dedication to Faunus, instead of the protomartyr. In this opinion they persist, though every part and feature of the structure—the difference of size in the columns, the coarse workmanship, the ill-fitted capitals and deficient bases, and above all, its total dissimilarity to any classical building—all its characteristics fully prove its original destination. The period of its dedication (467–483), by Simplicius, is well attested. Still it remains a question whether he did more than reconstruct, or perhaps enlarge, an edifice previously existing on the same site.

We cannot pursue the history of round churches, especially as connected with the Knights Templars, from whom it is impossible to disjoin them. We can only remark here, that the Templars affected the round or octagon form in Italy just as in England, as is evidenced by the church of the *Santo Sepolcro* at Pisa, anciently belonging to the order.

Round churches seem, from the scanty remains and still more scanty descriptions, to have been common in Scandinavia. An obvious conjecture would be, that the type was borrowed from Byzantium, through the medium of Russia; but from the only example of which we possess a description, namely, the round

church at *Soroe*, we are certain that they are exactly in the Romanesque style of Western Europe. *Soroe* is a circular building, with a chancel; the arches which connect the columns are of the usual semicircular form. There is a similar church at *Thorsager* (the Field of Thor) in Jutland, and four in Bornholm. Greenland displays the foundations of similar round structures, erected by the extinct Scandinavian colony. A very remarkable building at Newport, in Rhode Island, is now supposed to be the remains of a church erected by the Scandinavian discoverers of Vinland, whose further progress in the new continent was so mysteriously withheld. The structure, as it now stands, consists of a circular colonnade; the pillars being connected with circular arches. Without entering into discussion, which could not be satisfactory unless accompanied by accurate drawings, as well as a survey of the style of masonry, which *alone* could decide the question, it appears to us, on the face of the engravings published by the Copenhagen Antiquarian Society ('*Mémoires de la Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord*,' 1840–1843), to be entirely dissimilar to any structure which we can imagine to have been raised by the pilgrim fathers of New England.

Whatever exaggerated extension may have been given to the principle of symbolism, it is nevertheless quite clear that this species of allegory, suggested by Scripture, did prevail in the primitive Christian structures. Thus we have seen that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was supported by twelve pillars and lighted by twelve lamps. There were also twelve pillars in the adjoining Church of the Resurrection, upon which twelve lamps were placed, or suspended, in honour of the twelve apostles. From some analogy, not so easily perceptible, the octagon form was considered as peculiarly applicable to the baptistery:—

*'Octogonum sanctos templum surrexit in usus  
Octogonus fons est munere dignus eo.  
Hoc numero decuit sacra Baptismatis aulam  
Surgere, qua populus vera salus rediit.'*

And the octagon—the outer walls being often converted into a circle—constitutes the germ of those buildings so characteristic of the ecclesiastical architecture of Italy—we mean the detached baptisteries."

After describing the baptistery of *San Giovanni Laterano*, the writer continues:—

"We now approach the Gothic age. In Italy, the custom of considering the cathedral, for many purposes, as the sole parish-church, continued unaltered; and with the one parish, the one baptistery. Whilst, therefore, the main type of the baptistery was retained with religious fidelity, still the accident of locality, or the influence of individual genius, or caprice, occasioned several marked varieties. Parma thus possesses a splendid baptistery of a very singular character. Mr. Knight's engraving (vol. ii. plate xxiii.) gives an accurate representation of the exterior of this edifice: the interior, from its peculiar complexity, as well as from the bright and proportions of the building, would almost defy the artist's skill. It was completed, except as to the vaulting, between 1196 and 1216, from the designs of Antelmi. The exterior is an octagon, but within it offers sixteen sides, formed by working in the thickness of the wall. The details of the architecture are very remarkable: for whilst the general forms are Romanesque, you observe, as it were, a species of inroad of Gothic taste, which preponderates in the upper tier of arches by which the exterior is surrounded. The portals below are Romanesque, of a fine character; whilst in the intermediate stories there are Gothic pillars, connected by architraves, upon what may be called the classical principle, though wholly without the classical form.

The detached baptistery continued peculiar to Italy, and perhaps hardly any example can be found beyond the Alps, except in our own island. Elgin furnishes the solitary instance where the octagon baptistery, in the most graceful Gothic style, groups with the cathedral, whose deformed and neglected ruins relate the calamities which the church of Scotland has sustained.

Whatever beauty the circular form may possess, it is, taken singly and simply, most unfit for the Christian liturgy: and whatever interpolations are made, detract from the simplicity